The Only True and Living Church

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Our first responsibility and purpose is to testify of Jesus Christ to a world that suffers to know of His divine mission. As my response to that great responsibility, I will speak about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the only true and living Church. In doing so I know I speak against the powerful tide of what is called “political correctness.”

The fashionable opinion of this age is that all churches are true. In truth, the idea that all churches are the same is the doctrine of the anti-Christ, illustrated by the Book of Mormon account of Korihor (see Alma 30). That account was given to teach us a vital lesson in our day.

A revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1831, soon after the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, spoke of those who had been given “power to lay the foundation of this church.” The Lord then referred to the Church as “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased” (D&C 1:30).

Because of this declaration of the Lord, we refer to this, His Church—our Church—as the “only true Church.” Sometimes we do this in a way that gives great offense to people who belong to other churches or who subscribe to other philosophies. But God has not taught us anything that should cause us to feel superior to other people. Certainly all churches and philosophies have elements of truth in them, some more than others. Certainly God loves all of His children. And certainly His gospel plan is for all of His children, all according to His own timetable.

So what does it mean that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the only true Church?

Three features—(1) fulness of doctrine, (2) power of the priesthood, and (3) testimony of Jesus Christ—explain why God has declared and why we as His servants maintain that this is the only true and living Church upon the face of the

whole earth.

1. Fulness of Doctrine

When Jesus Christ was upon the earth, He taught the fulness of His doctrine, which is the plan that our Heavenly Father has outlined for the eternal progress of His children. Later, many of these gospel truths were lost through being diluted by the principles or philosophies then prevailing in the world where Christianity was preached and through the manipulations of political leaders. We call this loss of the fulness of truth the Apostasy.

Many church denominations or philosophies that exist in the world today contain, in greater or lesser measure, truths revealed by God in earlier days, along with a mixture of the philosophies or manipulations of men. We believe that most religious leaders and followers are sincere believers who love God and understand and serve Him to the best of their abilities. We are indebted to the men and women who kept the light of faith and learning alive through the centuries to the present day. We want all who investigate our church from other churches or systems of belief to retain everything they have that is good and to come and see how we can add to their understanding of truth and to their happiness as they follow it.

Because so much had been lost in the Apostasy, it was necessary that the Lord restore the fulness of His doctrine. That began with what we call Joseph Smith’s First Vision.

The fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ begins with the assurance that we lived as spirits before we came to this earth. It affirms that this mortal life has a purpose. It teaches that our highest aspiration is to become like our heavenly parents. We do this by qualifying for the glorified celestial condition and relationships that are called exaltation or eternal life, which will empower us to perpetuate our family relationships throughout eternity.

The doctrine of Jesus Christ, understood in its fulness, is the plan by which we can become what children of God are supposed to become. This spotless and perfected state will result from a steady succession of covenants, ordinances, and actions; an accumulation of right choices; and continuing repentance. “This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” (Alma 34:32). This is made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ and by obedience to the laws and ordinances of His gospel.

The restored gospel of Jesus Christ is comprehensive, universal, merciful, and true. Following the necessary experience of mortal life, all sons and daughters of God will be resurrected and go to a kingdom of glory more wonderful than any mortals can comprehend. With only a few exceptions, even the very wicked will ultimately go to a marvelous—though lesser—kingdom of glory. All of this will occur because of God's great love for His children, and it is all made possible because of the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, "who glorifies the Father, and saves all the works of his hands" (D&C 76:43).

2. Power of the Priesthood

The second and absolutely essential characteristic of the "only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth" is priesthood authority.

The Bible is clear that priesthood authority is necessary and that this authority had to be conferred by the laying on of hands by those who held it. Priesthood authority did not come from a desire to serve or from reading the scriptures. When that priesthood authority was lost through apostasy, it had to be restored by those resurrected beings who had held it in mortality and who were sent to confer it. That happened as part of the Restoration of the gospel, and that priesthood authority, together with the keys necessary to direct its operations, are in this Church and no other.

As a result of our having the power of the priesthood, the leaders and duly authorized members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are empowered to perform the required priesthood ordinances, such as baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the administration of the sacrament.

The keys of the priesthood, held by our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, and every other prophet and President of the Church, entitle him to revelation in behalf of the entire Church. This Church is "living" because we have prophets who continue to give us the word of the Lord that is needed for our time.

3. Testimony of Jesus Christ

The third reason why we are the only true Church is that we have the revealed truth about the nature of God and our relationship to Him, and we therefore have a

unique testimony of Jesus Christ. Significantly, our belief in the nature of God is what distinguishes us from the formal creeds of most Christian denominations.

The Articles of Faith, our only formal declaration of belief, begin as follows: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” We have this belief in the Godhead in common with the rest of Christianity, but to us it means something different than to most. We maintain that these three members of the Godhead are three separate and distinct beings and that God the Father is not a spirit but a glorified being with a tangible body, as is His resurrected Son, Jesus Christ. Though separate in identity, They are one in purpose.

Joseph Smith’s First Vision showed that the prevailing concepts of the nature of God and the Godhead were untrue and could not lead their adherents to the destiny God desired for them (see Joseph Smith—History 1:17–19). A subsequent outpouring of modern revelation clarified the significance of this fundamental truth and also gave us the Book of Mormon. This new book of scripture is a second witness of Christ. It affirms the biblical prophecies and teachings of the nature and mission of Christ. It enlarges our understanding of His gospel and His teachings during His earthly ministry. It also provides many teachings by which we may know the truth of these things.

We are not grounded in the wisdom of the world or the philosophies of men—however traditional or respected they may be. Our testimony of Jesus Christ is based on the revelations of God to His prophets and to us individually. (See 1 Corinthians 2:1–5; 2 Nephi 28:26.)

So what does our testimony of Jesus Christ cause us to affirm?

Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God, the Eternal Father. He is the Creator of this world. Through His incomparable mortal ministry, He is our teacher. Because of His Resurrection, all who have ever lived will be raised from the dead. He is the Savior, whose atoning sacrifice paid for the sin of Adam and opened the door for us to be forgiven of our personal sins so that we can be cleansed to return to the presence of God, our Eternal Father. This is the central message of the prophets of all ages.

I solemnly affirm my testimony of Jesus Christ and the truth of His gospel. He lives, and His gospel is true. He is the Light and Life of the World (see D&C 34:2). He is the Way to immortality and eternal life (see John 14:6). To me, the miracle of the

Atonement of Jesus Christ is incomprehensible. But the Holy Ghost has given me a witness of its truthfulness, and I can rejoice that I can spend my life in proclaiming it.

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